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COLLECTION OF PEASANTS' FORKS, SPOONS AND KNIVES FROM THE TYROL

A collection of peasants' spoons, forks and knives was recently purchased by the Museum. While they are all from the Tyrol, they represent some two or more centuries and as such they possess considerable interest. As is well known, spoons go back to extreme antiquity and early knives trace their pedigree to the flint flakes of the stone age. Forks, however, belong to European civilization.

Some of the forks have wooden handles, brass-mounted and adorned with ornamental brass knobs of various patterns. Others are inlaid and mounted in silver. There are sets of three pieces in sheaths, or "bestecks"—fork, knife and a round and pointed implement, flattened and perforated at about an inch and a half from the end.

The third piece in the "besteck," which describes a collection of implements for sticking in the pocket, was used primarily as a steel and possibly as a spit on which to hold a piece of venison to the fire while broiling. In this case, a peg stuck in the hole would prevent its falling off. According to Viollet-le-Duc, those that are perforated were also used for trussing fowls or meat before roasting. In the National Bavarian Museum collection in Munich some "bestecks" include a two-pronged instrument similar to the fork, but flexible. It is screwed *inside* the steel and was used for cleaning the forks. Another specimen includes a corkscrew.

It has been stated that the steel was also used as a netting needle for making string net bags similar to a fish net, used for market instead of a basket. This is less likely, as the handle must interfere. However that may be, attached to the women's belts of that period is always one of those steels or needles, the house key and a pocket knife buckled on, which shows that it was used as an implement of general utility. In some sets, however, the third tool is purely an ordinary round though pointed sharpener. The men carried these sets in a hip pocket or sheath.

The very small forks are possibly the oldest and may date from the 16th century, although that seems unlikely for reasons stated below. Such originally were used for fruit. The long serving forks also may be older than the rest. In some of the examples in the collection the handle is of natural stag-

horn; others are of bone more or less finely engraved with designs adorning the plaque of bone set in on the wooden handle. These come chiefly from Sterzing, Tyrol, and the surrounding villages. They possibly date from the middle of the 17th century. In Austria and Germany this work is known as



TABLE IMPLEMENTS

Sterzinger-bein-Arbeit, or Engraved Bone Art of Sterzing, Tyrol
Eighteenth Century

"Sterzinger-bein-Arbeit." It is still an industry but has much deteriorated. One of these forks (see second group) has a turned handle and is obviously of more recent date than the rest, as is the three-pronged specimen.

Quite a long series of bone forks and spoons are finely engraved with religious subjects. These were probably especially used for the Paschal Feast (Easter). In the illustration may be noted one representing St. Francis kneel-

ing before a crucifix (first group), while another represents a scene of rural transportation. The inscriptions are probably descriptive of the scenes represented.

Most of these implements are well made and form a fine exhibit of peasants' industrial art. It is noticeable that in the broken sets the knife is missing, which is due to the knife being so much more used by the hunter, and therefore being more liable to untoward accidents, loss or breakage.

Next to the three small and two long plain forks, the oldest are those with wooden handles inlaid with brass, silver or iron. These date from 1650 to 1750. The triangular handles seem to antedate the oval ones.

In the East, as indeed with the Greeks and Romans of antiquity, men ate with their fingers. Alone the spoon was used for liquids, and with the knife the food was separated, but it was carried to the mouth with the fingers. At all times, however, the manner in which this was done was a test of breeding. From the days of Pericles to those of St. Louis a well-bred person was recognized by the daintiness of this use of the fingers.

In the "Roman de la Rose,"⁽¹⁾ Jehan de Meung gives an interesting account of the table manners of the hostess of his day. It was regarded as correct for her to appear a little late.

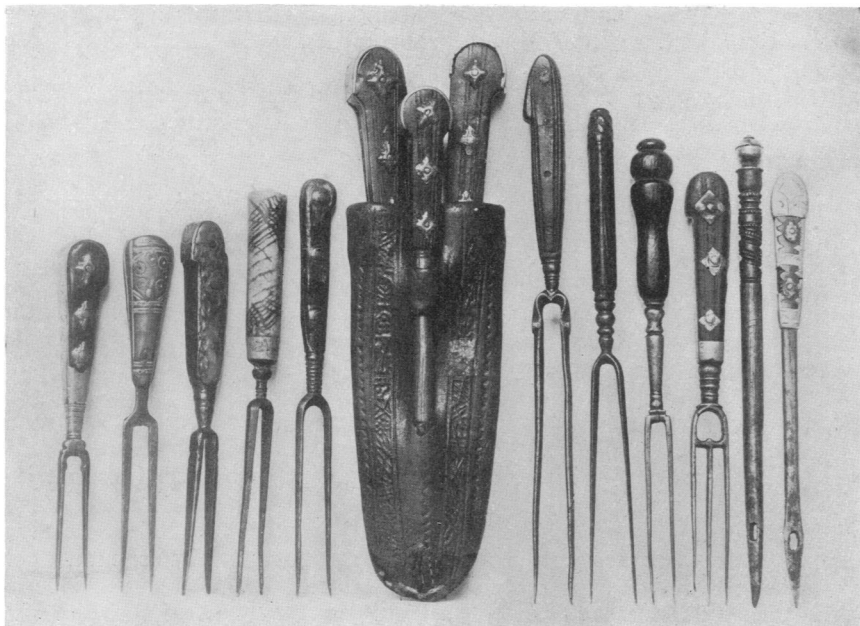
"Et ce face ung petit attendre," he says. She saw to it that her guests were seated and served, carving viands and distributing bread. Then she must gracefully serve him who ate off her dish, for then one plate did for two persons. In eating she must take care that her fingers did not get soiled above the joints and that no soup, garlic or fat cling to her lips. Nor must she put big or many pieces in her mouth. With the finger tips alone must she touch the piece that she would dip in the gravy, and then wisely lift the thing to her mouth so that not a drop fall on her breast of either soup, gravy or pepper.

There is a mention of forks in the inventory of Edward I. of England in 1297, and after this date other mentions of them appear but rarely. In the 14th century forks "for pears" occur in the inventory of Pier Gaveston (1313); and in an inventory of the "ducs de Bourgogne," 1420, is entered "*une bien petite fourchette d'or à manche tortillé pour manger meurs.*" It would seem that such forks were intended especially to protect the fingers from fruits that leave stains. Nevertheless, a writer, Barthélemy l'Anglais, who lived at the end of the 13th century and gives a spirited account of the table manners of the day, distinctly mentions that in setting the table "*on met les salières, les couteaux et les cuillers premièrement à table, et puis le pain,*" and makes no mention of forks.

A "Civilité" composed in Latin by a Sieur Sulpice, 1480, and translated in prose by Guillaume Durand, was later transposed in most original verse by a certain Pierre Broé, of Lyons. It recommends some curious manners that entirely preclude the use of forks. It says:

"Don't gnaw bones with your teeth as do dogs; nor yet tear them with nails as do birds of prey; but scrape them honestly with your knife so that the flesh is all together." It advises to throw bones and parings under the table,

(1) Edition Elzévirienne, vers. 13, 983, etc.



FORKS, KNIVES AND STEELS
Brass and Silver Mounted
Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

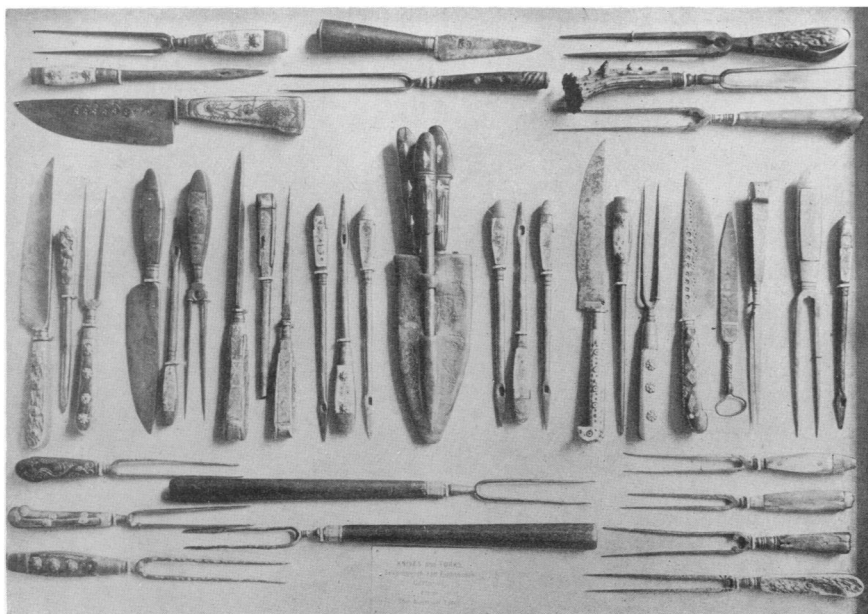


TABLE UTENSILS OF WOOD, BONE, STAGHORN
Variously Decorated with Silver, Brass, etc., Peasant Art of the Austrian Tyrol
Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

unless a basket is provided for the purpose; also urging not to use more than three fingers in taking your meat out of the dish, and advises not keeping your hand in the dish too long, nor yet to eat your meat with both hands.

However this may be, the early forks, from the Latin "furca," had but two prongs or "tines." The handles were of hard stone, crystal or ivory. Very few and rare are mediæval forks in collections, although spoons are plenty.

Henry Havard⁽¹⁾, while he cites the use of the fork among the Homeric Greeks and the Romans to hold before the fire meats to be broiled or roasted—as shown by the recovery of such implements at Pæstum, along the Appian Way and among the ruins of the fort of Longchamps (Eure), now at the Gisors Museum—and adds that from the 14th century exceptionally the fork appears to have been in use, questions the fact of its having been employed as now to carry viands to the mouth. This has given rise to controversies; but this careful investigator, after a meticulous examination of the evidence, concludes that until the end of the 16th century fingers were exclusively used and that the forks preserved prior to this epoch were destined for other usages.

In the first place, in mediæval inventories the number of forks is very small as compared to that of spoons. Moreover, the great richness of these small implements precluded the idea of common usage. In the inventory of Clemence de Hongrie (1328), for instance, thirty spoons are mentioned and one fork of gold. That of Jeanne d'Evreux (1372) mentions one golden fork. That of the Duke d'Anjou (1360) enumerates many spoons, of which nine were of gold, but not one fork. That of Charles V. (1380), besides a "small fork with twisted handle which belonged to the Queen Jeanne de Bourbon," one more is mentioned as being in the nef of the King. "La navette d'or goderonnée, et met-on dedens, quand le Roy est à table, son essay, sa cuillier, son coutelet et sa fourcette, et poise à tout le couvescle, trois marcs cinq onces et demie.—Item, l'essay, la fourcette, la cuiller, et le petit coustel, où il a une perle d'orient au bout, et poise, tout ensemble, trois onces." In addition Charles V. possessed one of gold with a sapphire at the end, one with crystal handle set in gold, etc., and two of silver with crystal handle, plus three knights and three squires of Brie, made into forks, *i. e.*, three white and three gilt to make the King's cheese toast, weighing one marc three ounces; altogether twelve forks. For a prince whose silver plate is valued at one and a half millions, that seems a scanty supply.

The inventory of the Duchess of Touraine (1389) has the entry of two spoons and forks of gilded silver and nine dozen spoons of white silver.

In the following century the relation between spoons and forks remains about the same. In the inventory of the Chateau de Vincennes (1418) three very handsome forks set with gems are recorded. In that of the Louvre (1420) six are entered, and even at the close of the 15th century they remain rare. The inventory of Charlotte of Savoie (1483) mentions but one.

These facts, which show the consistent rarity of a utensil that was to become so common, would be enough in themselves to demonstrate the scant use made of the fork, even though the chroniclers, poets and "raconteurs" of

(1) Dictionnaire de l'Ameublement et de la Décoration. (Quantin, Paris.)

the period did not bear testimony to this conclusion. None of the old chroniclers or writers mention forks. The "*Ménagier de Paris*," in which the most meticulously exact details are given on the housekeeping of ancient days, recommends in case of large dinners the placing of silver and plate under the surveillance of special officers whose duty will be to see that nothing is lost. "Two special equerries," it says, "will do for the handling of soiled things who will deliver the spoons and receive them back again." Nowhere are forks mentioned.

Then Chastellain, in his account of the banquet offered by the Duke of Burgundy to the English Ambassadors (1462), says: "No fault could be found, for there were as many mouths to feed as there were fingers to the hands of the eaters." The Ambassadors obviously ate with their fingers.

Moreover, a sentence of Olivier de la Marche (*Estat du Duc*, p. 684) shows that to carve, the equerry in charge took the meat with his fingers, which, by the way, explains the recommendation made by the Lady of the Belles Cousines to little Jehan de Saintré: "Hold your hands and your nails clean, for in all the offices of serving the Lord at table, yours most requires it." Later the first equerry carried in his armorial bearings as emblem of his office a knife and fork "*en sautoir*."

Be all this negative evidence as it may, the special use of the forks mentioned in the inventories is established in the documents that reveal their existence. Already we have seen that in Charles V.'s inventory forks were said to be intended for "toasting the King's cheeze"; in that of Charlotte de Savoie the fork is described as "to eat burned almonds." Another document (1390) mentions a gold fork for the Duchess of Orleans to take her "*soupe au vin*." Still another, in the account of the ducs de Bourgogne (1420), is specified to "eat blackberries," and the same use is ascribed to another in 1427. Prior to the 16th century no forks appear on the tables depicted in the illustrations, miniatures and others that have been preserved, and the constant use of the basin and ewer during this period and the 16th century points in the same direction.

Eloquent in this respect is the "*Galathee*," a sort of treatise on "Civility" by Monseigneur della Casa, bishop of Beneventum, published in French in 1598, in which he says:

"It would seem that one should not wash his hands before people, those are things that one does in his room and not in company. Nevertheless, when one is about to sit at the table one must wash one's hands in the presence of others, even though there may be no need for it, in order that those with whom one puts one's hands into the dish may have no doubt as to their cleanliness." Elsewhere the same writer adds: "A well bred man sees to it that his fingers are not greasy to such an extent as to soil the table cloth. To wipe one's fingers on the bread one is about to eat does not either seem well bred." Erasmus urged to take one's meat with three fingers as more "graceful." Other passages are quoted from Jamyn and Ronsard. Montaigne, however, while he distinctly says that he "could well dine without a cloth, but without a clean napkin, as do the Germans, most inconveniently," adds: "I soil them (fingers) more than they and the Italians do, and make little use of spoon or fork. I regret that the example of kings is not followed: that our napkins be changed with each

course, as they do our plates." But, of course, this brings us to the end of the 16th century, when forks were about to come into regular usage, as is made clear in "*L'Isle des Hermaphrodites*," published at the beginning of the 17th century, from which it appears that under Henri III. of France forks were used at court in that country. He describes a meal served to the king and his courtiers at which "the meats were so hashed, cut and disguised as to be unknown." Of course "they never touched the meats with their hands but with forks." Later he describes salad as eaten in the same way. At the same time he mentions some guests as awkward in their use of these implements, and as allowing "their mouthfuls to drop back into their plates and anywhere on the way to their mouths." The author of the story himself, however, distinctly states that he ate in the pantry and a scrimmage for food ensued, each taking all he could at first, for they might be sure never to put twice "their hands in the dish."

As late as 1633 Gougenot in his "*Comédie des Comédiens*" still mentions "putting the hand in the dish," and in 1673 says clearly that one should not put one's hand in the dish before those best qualified—"That one should take at once what one needs, as it is uncivil to put twice one's hand in the dish, and still worse to pick out piece after piece."

The use of forks, according to Havard, came in with the "fraise" collar, which made it next to impossible to carry food to one's mouth otherwise, without disaster to one's toilette. Coincidentally with the development of the "fraise" collars the number of forks increases in the inventories. That of Gabrielle d'Estrée records twenty forks (1599). A superb fork of late 16th century, sold at the Hotel Drouot in 1884, brought 121,400 francs. The handle was beautifully chased and adorned with diamonds and rubies.

Still, in 1609, the Princesse de Conti, in her escape from Paris, ate with her fingers and even with her gloves. On the other hand, Louis XIII. (1610-43) early contracted the habit of using a fork.⁽¹⁾ But Anne of Austria, having been brought up in Spain, never could get accustomed to forks and used her fingers, and the grande Mademoiselle did likewise⁽²⁾. Even as late as La Bruyère⁽³⁾, Gnathon's table manners are indescribably described. But the fact that La Bruyère was so critical of his ways shows him to have been a survival of an older time in a more refined age. Nevertheless, St. Simon⁽⁴⁾ shows that in order to establish the reign of the fork victoriously and definitely, no less an influence was needed than that of the Duc de Montansier. He lived in splendor and "had invented large spoons and large forks which he made the fashion." And it is notable that the first pictures in which forks appear, date of his time. Before this date in the early years of the 17th century, however, the irregular use of forks may be followed through legal documents in which defective forks or the counterfeit of marks gave rise to litigation. But if the duke did not "invent" the fork, he was identified with its regular use, and Scarron wrote then in his travesty of Virgil (I, p. 79) :

(1) Journal de Jean Havard, 9 Mai, 1612.

(2) (Memoires vol. IV. p. 112.) See also for the Chancellor Eéguier: Tallemant des Réaux III, p. 39.

(3) Caractères ch. XI.

(4) Note on Journal de Dangeau, p. 127.

Il était si propre, dit-on,
Qu'il n'eut pas pour un ducaton—
(Grand signe d'attention nette)—
Voulu rien manger sans fourchette.

In the 17th century the great of the land, at least, were well accustomed to the use of the fork. In those days when the dread of poison haunted the minds of all men of importance, the dishes were always brought on covered, and the spoon, knife and fork of the sovereign were enclosed in the "nef" (hence the word "cover") used for the three implements. Everything, however, before being used by host or guest, was subjected to a curious test. Not only did the appointed servants test the viands, but they did also the implements, or they simply touched them with the talismans they regarded as infallible preservers, such as the tongue of a snake, the horn of the narval, the stone called "crapaudine" and believed to come in the head of a toad, etc. The gentleman in charge of the "nef" and of the implements therein contained touched each of these, as well as the plate, toothpicks, etc., with a piece of bread that one of the table officers at once swallowed, when the king proceeded with his meal.

At the close of the 17th century treatises on manners mention the fork (see "Traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnêtes gens," 1673, which not only prescribes the use of a fork, but forbids its use after a meal as a toothpick). At the close of the 17th century the inventory of the furniture of the Crown (22 April, 1697) mentions 445 forks, of which 113 were in silver gilt and the balance of silver. Other private inventories are that of the Abbé d'Effiat (1698), which mentions seventeen forks, and that of Marquis de Montpipeau (1692), twelve forks and twelve spoons. A number of inventories of goods of more humble persons mention from six to twelve, the last number becoming fixed in the 18th century. At this time they seem to have often been with three prongs, although the fact of this being specifically mentioned shows that the two-pronged fork was the usual form. Wooden forks were still used in the 18th century. Oyster forks appear in the 18th century (1786), but were not obligatory in France in the 19th century.

The general condition of table manners and customs prevailing at the courts of France and England as late as the reign of Henry IV (1589-1610), therefore, makes it unlikely that in the mountains of the Tyrol forks should have been in use at this time among the peasants. It is my belief that most of the specimens in the present series belong to the 18th and early 19th centuries.

S. Y. S.

